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THE ARCTIC REGIONS,

AND

THE HOPES OF DISCOVERING THE LOST ADVENTURERS.

A Poem,

WHICH OBTAINED

THE CHANCELLOR'S MEDAL

AT THE

CAMBRIDGE COMMENCEMENT,

M.DCCCLII.

"Hard task indeed o'er Arctic seas to roam!
Is hope exotic? grows it not at home?"

COWPER's *Hope*.

BY

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SCHOLAR OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

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THE ARCTIC REGIONS,
AND THE
HOPES OF DISCOVERING THE LOST ADVENTURERS.

"There is a hand that guides."—TENNYSON. *The Princess*.

FAREWELL to mossy vale, and sapphire sky,
Green earth, and golden wood, and silver wave,
The lily, and the zephyr, and the rose!
Farewell! I may not rest the crown'd harp
On emerald meads, or wreath its fretted base
With blushing flowerets, while a gentle bride
Lists the sweet shiver of the ringing chords.
Ah no! away! away! another tone
Must gleam upon the lute, in snowy lands
Where not a bud can tinge its purple cup,
Or shake its dewy bell;—on ic'd hills
I must imbed the pedals;—and my hands,
Ah me! the cold touch of my frozen hands,
Must trill and twangle on the glimmering strings
Until they all flash fire¹.

For I must sing
Of hero-daring, and of woman's love,
And of a glorious nation's fearful hopes
All centred on a continent of snow.

¹ Cf. *παύειν δὲ λάμπει*. Soph. *Æ. R.* 186.

"His beams shall cheer my heart, and both so twine
Till e'en his beams sing, and my music shine."—Herbert.

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Now on the yellow seashell-flowered sand
 Floated the rose of eve,—and each proud ship,
 Enshadowed on the mirror of the waves,
 Lay on the calméd jasper, like a swan.
 The cabin-boy had kissed his mother's lips,
 And spake brave words of cheer, as tho' the light
 That bathed the merry darkness of his eye
 Were but a smile; the sailor on the shore
 Clasped his fond wife; and the lieutenant stood
 With strong hand on the fair and golden curls
 Of his bright child; oh! it was hard indeed
 To kiss the dew-gems from his fragrant cheek,
 And, breathing still the lilies of his face,
 Leave him for weary days—and still the boy
 Clung sobbing on his hand, nor let it go.

"But hark, they call! Farewell! in three short years,
 Dearest...Farewell!" and in the boat he leapt,
 And the oars dipp'd and flashed: and now they stand
 Upon the shining decks, and their white wings
 The gallant vessels to the winds unfurled,
 And left the fading shores. And stars came out
 And looked upon the wave, and all was still,
 Save the light flapping of the crimson flags,
 And murmur of the breezes in the sail,
 And shouting¹ of the cleft phosphoric wave
 Round the curved prows;—so did the light wind speed
 The Erebus and Terror on their way.

¹ ἀμφὶ δὲ κύμα Στείρη πορφύρεον μεγάλ' ἔαχε νηὶς λούσης.

Hom. *Il.* i. 481.

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Oft had the Orient at Hyperion's feet
 Flushed into fire and flower, and from his arm
 The rubied orb of his empyreal shield
 Flamed thro' the zenith; often had he flung
 Purpureal¹ mantles on the radiant foam
 Down from his westering chariot, and the stars
 Had gazed at twilight from their jewel-thrones
 On the blue bosom of the twinkling deep:—
 And still the shores swept by: and now by day,
 Winging the cold air's lucent² hyaline,
 Strange birds were seen to flutter at the mast,
 And iridescent in the moony wave
 Strange³ fishes seen to flounder at the keel,
 That thro' the floating crystals of the frost
 Crisped a slow path: and still the light wind sped
 The Erebus and Terror on their way.

Lo! it comes looming thro' the shadowed sea,
 Towering and tossing on the crested swell
 The mountain of bright ice! down fathom-deep
 Swept by mysterious currents floateth strange
 Its everlasting base, and to the sun

¹ "As slowly he descended, carpeting *The western waves with glory*, ere he deigned To set his foot upon them."—T. E. Hankinson.

² "The air is very transparent, and often filled with delicate floating icy crystals."—Scoresby, *Arctic Regions*, p. 113. "The ethereal brilliancy of the polar sky."—Id. p. 19.

³ "We had numerous birds hovering round the ship."—Sir J. Franklin's *Voyage to the Polar Seas*. "A shoal of grampuses and porpoises came dancing and bounding about the bows of the vessel."—*Private Journal of a distinguished officer on board the Erebus*.

In mingling gleams of emerald and pearl
Flash out its opal peaks.

Beware! beware!

For terror haunts its beauty—hark! a crash
As of a thousand thunders, and with shock
Terrific as an earthquake the huge mass
Bursts with a shiver, while the writhing deep
Bellows, and rushing on with wrathful wave
Shakes the tall vessels on its howling surge!

The echoes of the rocking mountains heard
And shouted a reply; the ivory Lar¹
Rose clanging on the wind; the tusk'd beast
Plunged to his depths, and fierce Leviathan
Slapping² the maddened ocean with his tail
Wallowed in terror, till the hoary deep
Lay white for many a rood.

But *they* were safe,

Aye! they rode safely on the glassy green
Of silvery³ waters, and with thankful hearts
Prayed to the God of heaven; and it seemed
That angel-ministrants did guide them on
Thro' dangers of the wonder-peopled deep,
Wild waves, and floating lands, and rushing rocks,

¹ "The *Larus eburneus*, remarkable for its immaculate whiteness."—Scoresby.

² "Rearing their tails high in the air they beat the water with awful violence; the sea is thrown into foam."—Id.

³ "The sea is of the most perfect transparency—a beautiful, delicate, cold-looking green."—*Private Journal*, &c.

Unfabled Strophades; so mercy sped
The Erebus and Terror on their way.

No longer! for the heaped and marble ice
Thickened in azure hummocks¹ round the keels;
And, gemmed with icy stars, the idle ships
Lay locked and frozen on the frozen wave!

'Cold, weary, chilly-cold²—the very breath
Falling in silvery circlets—and the blood
Beating and bounding in the throbbing pulse.
Ah! we must die! and yet the legends tell
Of a green³ Eden 'mid the whitening wastes
Of the wild North; but not a flower is here
Save crystals of the bright lamellar snow
And glitter of the cold unheeding stars⁴.

'O! for an emerald field, a sunny light,
A scent of lilies in the forest moss,
A waving in the coronal of trees!
O for the purple noon, the gorgeous noon,
Beneath the bright warm sun! but we must lie

¹ "That splendid blue (of the ice), which is perhaps one of the richest colours that nature affords."—Parry, Vol. III. p. 20. "Hummocks somewhat relieve the uniformity of intense light by exhibiting shades of delicate blue."—Scoresby.

² "An Arctic winter consists of the accumulation of almost all which is disagreeable to the feelings."—Id.

³ See the beautiful mythology of the Eddas and Sagas.

⁴ "The stars, those eternal *flowers* of heaven."—Greg. Naz.

"In the infinite meadows of heaven
Blossomed the lovely stars."—Longfellow's *Evangeline*.

And freeze, and perish in the reeking fogs
Far from our native land!

'Nay, brothers, nay!

God's hand is over us, his sleepless eye
Watcheth our sorrows.—Cease we to repine,
Trust we in him!¹

Yet not an easy task
Was your's, brave chiefs, loved Franklin and Fitzjames,
To still the murmurs of that misery.
But God is present in the howling wilds,—
Why should we fear?

Five² times the laughing Spring
Shook violets on the fields of chrysoprase;
And Summer floated on her fragrant cloud
Over our land; and Autumn from wreath'd horn
Flung nectarine and peach; and Winter rolled,
Rolled silver-axled o'er the flowerless fields:
Ah where were they?

'Twas night, long Arctic night,
And the red meteor-arches spanned the sky
With quick continual flash,—and they had asked
The gentle savage³, the mild Esquimaux,
'What means yon purpling⁴ iris?' and he cried

¹ "We were inspired with so strong a sense of the Omnipresence of a beneficent God that our situation even in these wilds appeared no longer destitute."—Sir J. Richardson's *Narrative*. "I endeavoured to encourage him by explaining the mercy of God, who ever beholds with an eye of pity those that seek his aid."—Mr Back's *Narr.* See the whole of this harrowing story, and cf. Parry, I. 214.

² The expedition sailed in June, 1845.

³ "The gentle and loving savage," as one of the old simple-hearted voyagers calls the Esquimaux. See the interesting and favourable accounts given of them by Parry and Franklin.

⁴ πορφύρεον ἶρις.—Hom. *Il.* xi. 27.

'The spirits of my fathers are at play.'
 But old men shook their heads and made reply,
 'Nay, 'tis the waving of a fiery flag,
 In signal to the spirits of the storm!'

And the storm came! blaring with hideous tramp²
 The mad wind pounced upon the tattered shrouds,
 And bent the creaking mast, and howled and screamed,
 And swept in fury o'er the splitting fields
 That rang, and shrieked, and thundered, as the ships,
 Fierce-crashing with their tempest-driven keels,
 Drove plunging thro' the terrors of the night
 'Neath the black sky—so did the storm-fiend speed
 The Erebus and Terror on their way.
 Whither?

Ah me! the dim and blinding tears
 Gush to mine eyes. I cannot see them more.

Hail! glorious vision hail! ambrosial wings
 Her form immantling, on the rosy snow
 Resteth the golden sandal of her foot,
 A glimmering amethyst—and o'er her brow
 Falls the pale lustre of her crown'd hair:
 I know her who she is! for one white hand
 Doth rest upon an anchor's graceful haft,

¹ "The Northern Lights are supposed to be indicative of a violent storm."—Scoresby.

² ἀμφὶ δ' ἐσάλπιγγεν μέγας οὐρανός.—Hom. *Il.* xxi. § 98.

And none but her twin-sister of the torch¹
 Hath eye as bright as her's—Oh glorious sight,
 Her right hand pointeth to the glooming North,
 And sweetly, softly, fall the dewy² tones,
 The tones of dewy music, 'They are safe,
 Trust in the mercy of the God of Love!'
 Then might I mark once more the shattered ice
 Clashing its horrid cymbals, and the fiends
 Who rained on those fair ships their furious blows.
 But starry-diadem'd and fiery-carr'd
 Floated a fair-haired band of seraph youths
 Amid the hurricane—and every blow
 They warded with a pure and shining hand,
 Or on a diamond buckler's rainbow rim
 Shielded its lightning fall. Then full of joy
 I bowed my head, I murmured, 'They are safe,
 Safe thro' the mercy of the God of Love.'

But she in a dark chamber far away
 Stood clad in light; a weeping³ lady there
 Before the throne of God on bended knee

¹ "Faith, Hope, and Charity, from the visible world
 Choose for your emblems whatsoe'er ye find
 Of safest guidance, or of firmest trust,
The torch, the star, the anchor."—Wordsworth's *Exc.* Bk. v.

² "Hark what a dewy dewy close was there!"—Cowper.

³ I perhaps ought to remark on this passage, that I have had no individual sufferer in view, but have meant rather to express the mental agony of bereavement, and gladdening alternations of hope, which must be equally felt by all who are connected with the gallant officers and seamen on board the illfated vessels.

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Knelt with her sobbing child: their hands were clasped
 Upon the wet sad cheek, and her dark locks
 Fell mingled with the hyacinth¹ of his.
 O sweeter than the myrrh of Saba's groves
 Uprose the fragrant incense of their prayer
 To mingle with a thousand thousand more
 In censured hands before the jacinth throne
 Od'rous and sweet and rich! oh smile of heaven
 That on their raised faces softly gleams,
 Lighting the tearful eyes. They too have heard,
 Have heard the angel-whisper, 'They are safe,
 Fear not, but trust ye in the God of Love.'

Aye, and a nation heard it! tho' the tones
 Were soft as song² of flowers on summer eve,
 A nation heard it, and the princely barques
 Winged³ their dread journey to the desolate main
 Seeking the lost ones.

¹ καὶ δὲ κάρητος Οὐλᾶς ἦκε κόμας ὑακινθίνῃ ἀνθει ὁμοίας.

Hom. *Od.* vi. 230.

παρθενικαὶ βάλλοντα κόμαις ὑάκινθον ἔχουσαι.—Theocr. xviii. 2.

² "The hyacinth

Flung from its bells a *sweet peal* anew,
 Of *music* so delicate, soft, and intense,
 It was felt like an odour within the sense."

Shelley's *Sens. Plant.*

"Every leaf in every nook
 Chanting with a solemn voice, &c."

Keble. cf. Ps. lxi. 12.

³ An Expedition sailed to look for Sir J. Franklin, in Feb. 1848. A second in the spring, under Sir J. Ross. Another, under Sir J. Richardson and Dr Rae, left in March to proceed overland. Several others have since been despatched under Capt. Austen, Sir E. Belcher, &c.

But they found them not!
 Tho' here and there, on sheets of shuddering ice,
 They found the ashes of deserted fires,
 And scattered relics of their former homes.

Then some were all a-weary; and they cried,
 'Dead are they, tombed upon the bleaching ice,
 Or tossing in the seaweed's tangled hair;
 Dead are they—wherefore do we seek them more?'

But still I hear the lute-soft lily-song¹
 Of gentle Hope—still trilling 'They are safe,
 Safe are they, trust ye in the God of Love.'

O hearken! hearken! hearken! my loved land!
 Still man thy glorious vessels to the North
 Seeking the lost. Go, gallant Beaufort,—go,
 Austen, and Pym, and lion-hearted Ross
 Traverse the colorless Arctic! Let the love,
 The tender love of mother and of wife
 Burn like a star, and blessings of our God
 Glide like a fiery pillar on your path.
 So, haply soon, shall mercy-wing'd winds
 Be speeding home to their loved native land
 The Erebus and Terror on their way;
 Or we shall know that all the toils are o'er
 Of our loved friends, and in the sinless land
 Resting in quiet haven they are safe,
 Safe thro' the mercy of the God of Love!

¹ ὅσα λειριόεσσαν. Hom. Il. iii. 152.

